

See What's Possible

Program Overview

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program for landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, shrubland, and certain other lands. The program emphasizes support for working grazing operations; enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity; and protection of grassland under threat of conversion.

Working cooperatively with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), GRP participants implement grazing plans that benefit natural resources such as wildlife habitat, water quality, plant diversity, forage productivity and soil quality which collectively influence watershed health. GRP targets grasslands of high biological value that are vulnerable to conversion to urban uses, cropland or other non-grazing uses and conserves them through perpetual easements, or 10, 15, or 20-year rental agreements.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- Landowners and operators who have general control of the acreage (for rental agreements)
- Landowners who can provide clear title on privately owned lands (for easements)
- Tribes

The Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provision of the 2008 Farm Bill impacts eligibility for GRP. Individuals or entities that have an average adjusted gross nonfarm income exceeding \$1 million for the three tax years immediately before the year the contract is approved are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments.



However, an exemption is provided in cases where two-thirds of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.

How GRP Works

Applications may be filed for a rental agreement or an easement with NRCS or Farm Services Agency (FSA).

Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding.

GRP rental contracts and easements prohibit crop production (other than hay), fruit trees, and vineyards and any other activity inconsistent with maintaining grazing land. A grazing management plan is required.

Each state establishes ranking criteria to prioritize enrollment of working grasslands. Ranking criteria will consider threats of conversion including cropping, invasive species, urban development, and other activities that threaten plant and animal diversity on grazing lands.

GRP enrollment options include:

Rental Contract. Participants may choose a 10-year, 15-year, or 20-year contract. USDA will provide annual payments in an amount that is not more than 75 percent of the grazing value established by the FSA. Payments will not exceed \$50,000 per year per person or legal entity and will be disbursed annually. For a list of GRP rental rates for California by county, download a copy at <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/CA/programs/GRP/2009/2009-California-GRP-Annual-Rental-Rates.pdf>.

Permanent Easement. These conservation easements are perpetual. Easement compensation will not exceed fair market value, less the grazing value of the land encumbered by the easement.

See What's Possible

"Grazing value" means the financial worth of the land used for grazing or forage production. Easement compensation will be the lowest of an area-wide market survey or appraisal, a Geographic Area Rate Cap, or the landowner offer. USDA will provide all administrative costs associated with easement recording, including survey costs, title-insurance, and recording fees.

Restoration Agreement. Certain grassland easements or rental contracts may be eligible for cost-share assistance up to 50 percent of the cost to re-establish grassland functions and values where the land has been degraded or converted to other uses. Participants may contribute to the application of a cost-share practice through in-kind contributions. The combined total cost-share provided by all sources may not exceed 100 percent of the total actual cost of restoration. Payments will not exceed \$50,000 per year per person or legal entity.



Legislative and Regulatory Changes

The 2008 Farm Bill:

- Authorizes USDA to enter into cooperative agreements with entities to enable them to acquire easements. The Federal government will pay up to 50 percent of the purchase price of the easement. The right to enforce the easement is the responsibility of the cooperating entity; if the entity fails to enforce the terms of the easement, Federal enforcement is required.

For More Information

For more information on GRP, please contact your local NRCS office. You can find NRCS contact information and GRP updates on the California NRCS website at:

**[www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/
programs/grp.html](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grp.html)**

Updated: Jan. 2011